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SENATOR STEVENS

NO. 5316 P. 2/2

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 9, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

It has come to our attention that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will develop a regulation for mandatory country of origin labeling later this month. For the first time the USDA will consider country of origin labeling for fish products, an important marketing distinction for wild fish harvested in U.S. waters and processed domestically. We submit the following comments regarding the law.

U.S. country of origin law should apply to wild fish harvested in the waters of the U.S. or by a U.S. flagged vessel and processed domestically or aboard a U.S. flagged vessel. Secondary processing such as filleting, steaking, breading or adding spices should not constitute a material change to the product to a point where it is no longer labeled by its country of origin. In addition, the intent of Congress is that canning or cooking is not a material change to the product itself; canned or cooked product should not be exempt from country of origin labeling.

The intent of country of origin labeling is to accurately reflect the nation where that fish was harvested. Fish imported from a foreign nation and processed or altered in some way in the U.S. should be labeled as the product of that nation. This should greatly reduce consumer confusion of where the fish was originally harvested.

The commercial fishing industry is an integral piece of Alaska's economy and it is imperative that the country of origin labeling law provide consumers the choice to purchase fish coming from the U.S.

With best wishes,



TED STEVENS
United States Senator



LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator